DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 470 CE 076 980

AUTHOR	Kirsch, Jean-Louis; Manning, Sabine
TITLE	Comparisons of Vocational Education and Training Systems: Results of the Intequal Project.
INSTITUTION	Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications, Marseilles (France).
ISSN	ISSN-1156-2366
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	5p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	Training & Employment; n31 Spr 1998
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Articulation (Education); Comparative Analysis; Education Work Relationship; Educational Change; *Educational Practices; Feasibility Studies; Foreign Countries; *Innovation; *Integrated Curriculum; International Educational Exchange; Postsecondary Education; Program Improvement; Secondary Education; Systems Approach; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Europe

ABSTRACT

The Intequal project examined approaches to vocational education and training (VET) in seven European countries. Intequal is an acronym for the French phrase "integrer les qualifications." The study focused on the following: functioning of integrated qualifications in the context of the educational system and the social and economic framework of the countries in question; educational issues implied in the schemes of integrated qualification in relation to the learning process, validation of competencies, and individual guidance; and transfer of qualitative innovation into mainstream VET and across national systems through pilot projects under the Leonardo program. Three types of recent transformations of VET were identified: schemes related to integrated systems of general and vocational qualification that fall under overall legislation on education; schemes operating within a more diversified system of courses and institutions under the authority of various educational and professional bodies; and schemes based on the dual system of vocational education and qualifying for the vocational stream of higher education. It was concluded that, although the prospect of transferable solutions adopted from one country to another does not appear to make sense at present, three forms of mutual enrichment are worth considering: exploring the possibility of modeling, identifying common questions, and taking into account the phase of application where innovation occurs. (MN)

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COMPARISONS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS: RESULTS OF THE INTEQUAL PROJECT

The Leonardo programme defines a certain number of priorities for the comparison of vocational education and training programmes in the different European countries. Given the variety of social contexts involved, and particularly the place of vocational training, what can such a comparison offer? Céreq's participation in the Intequal project (Acquisition of Integrated Qualifications for Professional Work and Study) provides the basis for an answer to this question.

The INTEQUAL project

Through the Leonardo programme, Céreq participated in the project known as Intequal: "The acquisition of integrated qualifications for professional work and study: An assessment of innovative approaches in seven European countries". The proposed objectives of this project were summarised by its organisers as follows:

"A basic issue in EU countries is how to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training and to place it on equal footing with general education. One approach initiated in a number of countries is to offer 'double' or 'integrated' qualifications which open up alternative paths into professional work and advanced studies. The proposed project will be designed so as to provide descriptive and analytical knowledge for understanding both the differences and the common features of integrated qualifications, background knowledge on the trend towards integrating general and vocational education, and action-oriented knowledge fostering the exchange of experience with these schemes.

"Three major areas of investigation were envisaged:

• the functioning of integrated qualifications in the context of the educational system and the social and economic framework of the countries in question;

• the educational issues implied in the schemes of integrated qualification, particularly in relation to the learning process, the validation of competences and individual guidance;

• the transfer of qualitative innovation achieved in these schemes into mainstream vocational education and across national systems via pilot projects under LEONARDO."[1]

The project thus intended to compare relatively recent transformations in vocational training in the different countries. These changes took different forms depending on the systems in the countries involved, which, for the purposes of the project, were divided into three categories:

1. Schemes related to integrated systems of general and vocational qualification, which fall under overall legislation on education:

• The new vocational programmes at upper secondary level in Sweden and Norway, which lead to a basic vocational qualification and a general entitlement for access to higher education;

1. "Der Erwerb integrierter Qualifikationen für Beruf und Studium - eine Untersuchung innovativer Ansätze in sieben europäischen Ländern" (proposal submitted to the European Commission). Berlin: Wissenschaftsforum Bildung und Gesellschaft e. V (WIFO), August 1995, p. 8.

CE 076 980

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• The professional *baccalauréat* in France, which provides alternative paths into employment and advanced studies.

2. Schemes operating within a more diversified system of courses and institutions under the authority of various educational and professional bodies:

• The modular courses leading to the General National Vocational Qualification at advanced level in England;

• The diploma for long MBO courses in the Netherlands, which qualifies for professional work as well as higher vocational education (HBO) in the same field.

3. Schemes based on the dual system of vocational education and qualifying for the vocational stream of higher education:

• Pilot projects in Germany (Bavaria/Brandenburg) offering a complete vocational training programme for skilled workers and the entrance qualification for advanced technical colleges (*Fachhochschule*);

• Part-time vocational courses for skilled workers at the private technical academies (*Fachakademien*) in Austria, which lead to an advanced technical qualification also entitling studies in a related field.

Theoretical issues

From the outset, the different partners were well aware, albeit in general terms, of the differences in their respective situations: the German dual system is a watertight training stream nearly exclusively aimed at preparing for a professional activity, while the French vocational *baccalauréat* is explicitly based on the principle of the dual orientation, which is concretised by the existence of cross-overs between the different training streams.

Under these circumstances, comprehension is a necessary prerequisite to comparison, as is clear from two basic conclusions of studies carried out in the field of international comparisons:

• Each comparative analysis must begin by questioning the principles of comparability it is invoking;

• Every vocational training system is part of a societal whole, and as a result, "country differences concerning wages, operations, diploma structure or labour-management strategy . . . reveal interdependencies proper to each society and emerge as central to the definition of these societies and the forms of economic and social regulation characterising them".[2] This situation precludes reasoning in terms of functional equivalence and defining one most efficient system which would be applicable in any country context. We can thus avoid brute forms of comparison like those that imposed their consequences on the French educational system in the mid 1980s, with the successive goals of bringing 30 percent of an age group to the *baccalauréat* level on the Japanese model and then doubling the number of apprentices on the (West) German model.

On the other hand, we may still question the possibility and usefulness of comparing systems that seem incomparable because of their particular social context. On this issue, an initial response was proposed in the wake of the studies by Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre already cited: the comprehensive detour imposed by the analysis of a foreign system has an explanatory power that enriches the questions raised about the national system as well as the analytical grids applied to it. As examples of this heuristic enrichment, we may cite the research conducted by Campinos-Dubernet and Grando or, more recently, Verdier and Möbus.[3] The fact still remains, however, that in this kind of analysis the country specificities remain insurmountable, and it is difficult to imagine how the systems of the different countries might be brought together. On this point, Freyssinet and Lefresne take a more nuanced position, according to which, "national specificities, which are the product of a historical dynamic, have a high level of inertia but do not lead to determinism."[4] According to this hypothesis, the analysis of innovations may bring out dynamics and convergences that would be hidden by a comparison based on structural features culturally rooted in the training systems.

An approach through innovation

The Leonardo programme falls within this second approach:

• It recognises the existence of a societal dimension and specifies that, in order to develop a high-quality vocational training system, one must first understand how the existing system fits into its wider cultural and socio-economic context and the manner in which it forms one of the many interconnected and interdependent factors dealing with competitiveness and employment."[5]

• It encourages the analysis of the questions faced by these different systems and provide a medium for their transformations, which suggests that such questions may provide the opportunity for similar or shared experiments allowing historical specificities to be at least partially surmounted.

The Intequal project, which is part of this Leonardo programme, recognises a societal effect and the possibility of convergences, or even solutions that are to some degree transferable on the basis of innovations introduced in order to encourage the dual orientation of the diplomas. These two dimensions of analysis provided a framework for developping the assessment of the resulting comparative analyses.

2. M. Maurice, F. Sellier and J-J. Silvestre, *Politique d'éducation et organisation industrielle en France et en Allemagne*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982.

3. M. Campinos-Dubernet and J. M. Grando, "Formation professionnelle ouvrière : trois modèles européens," *Formation Emploi* no. 22 (1988); M. Möbus and E. Verdier, 'La construction des diplômes professionnels en Allemagne et en France', Céreq *Bref* no. 130 (April 1997).

4. J. Freyssinet and F. Lefresne, Seminar on the international comparison of youth transition schemes (unpublished document). Paris, 1993.

5. "Leonardo da Vinci Promoters' Guide 1995". European Commission, General Direction XXII, Education, Training, Youth.

Confirmation of the "societal effect"

Situating the dual-orientation training models within their respective national systems brought out a variety of positions with regard to the following criteria:

- size of the scheme
- place within upper secondary education
- balance of the dual orientation
- level of vocational training
- access to higher education
- target groups
- organisation of learning
- support agencies
- stage of implementation

The following table illustrates this diversity.[6]

Characteristics of the schemes

Criterion	Distinction	Scheme						
		A	E	F	G	NL	N	S
Dimension	Educ. sector						■	■
	Indiv. course	■	■	■		■		
	Indiv. project				■			
Orientation	Employment	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
	Higher educ.	■	▨	■	▨	■	■	■
Level of training	Initial		▨		▨	▨	▨	▨
	Further	▨		▨				
Target group	Young unqualif.		▨	■	▨	▨	▨	▨
	Young qualified		■	▨				
	Adult qualified	▨	■	■			■	■
Access to higher educ.	Techn. course	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
	Acad. course	■	▨	■			▨	▨
Organisation of learning	Full-time		▨	▨		▨	▨	▨
	Dual			■	▨		▨	
	Part-time	▨	■					
Supporting agency	Government		▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
	Industry	▨	■	■	▨	■		■
Implement-ation stage	Initial	▨	▨		▨		▨	▨
	Established			▨		▨		

▤ = valid / equally valid (within a scheme)
▨ = more valid (within a scheme)
■ = less valid (within a scheme)
□ = not valid

A = Austria: WIFI Academies
E = England: GNVQ: advanced level
F = France: vocational baccalauréat (Bac pro)
G = Germany: pilot projects within the dual system of voc. educ.
NL = The Netherlands: MBO: long courses
N = Norway: vocational streams within upper secondary education
S = Sweden: vocational programmes within upper secondary education

6. From the book published on Intequal's outcomes: A. Brown and S. Manning (ed.), "Qualifications for employment and higher education - A collaborative investigation across Euope", Tampere University, 1998.

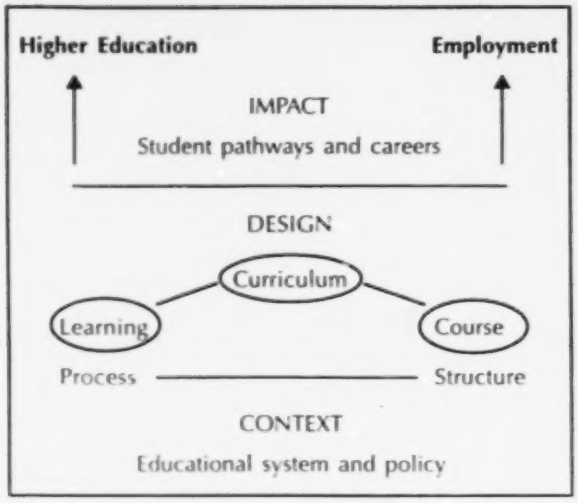
In spite of the supposedly federating nature of the theme, the country specificities are evident and leave their mark on innovations: these appear to be marginalised in relation to the rigourous framework of the German dual system, integrated into the logic of the streams and cross-overs of the French, English or Dutch systems and included in a general revision of upper secondary education in Norway or Sweden. This first analysis confirms the power of history and the impossibility of constructing a topology, even within apparently close models. Each country is a particular case, and any attempt to generalise seems risky: "In no way can one deduce a ranking of schemes".[7] The mutual learning generated by European co-operations must be sought elsewhere.

Transferable solutions or common questions?

Given these preliminary observations, the prospect of transferrable solutions adopted from one country to another has no sense. Does this mean that the mutual learning of this comparative exercise amounts to recognition that comparison is impossible? Undoubtedly, if the objective is an identical transfer of solutions from one country to the other. But at the same time, three forms of mutual enrichment are worth singling out:

• *A possibility of modelling* that allows the points of maximum innovation and the relations between them to be situated (see schema below). This schema offers the particular advantage of seeking links between the context, the conception and the objectives of the training system, but also the autonomy that characterises each of these aspects. Thus, countries that differ sharply in the relationship between innovation and the dual orientation--the desire to monitor the continuation of studies amongst vocational *baccalauréat* holders in France, to develop those with the GNVQ in the United Kingdom, to maintain a certain separation of streams in the Netherlands--have the same questions about the link to be redefined between vocational and general training. Beyond the country specificities previously cited, the question of integrating general and vocational education runs throughout all these systems and gives rise to proposals for key qualifications, core skills and cross-linked competences which must be carefully studied in terms of both their differences and their similarities.

7. Sabine Manning (ed.), "Qualifications with a dual orientation towards employment and higher education. A comparative investigation of selected issues in seven European countries. Intequal Report II". Berlin: WIFO, 1997.



• *The identification of questions that are fairly common* amongst the members of the group. To cite one example, the fact that the Norwegian system went from 13 to 210 specialities in 3 years is worth studying more closely in relation to the French approach of seeking the broadest possible core curricula.

• *The taking into account of the phase of application where the innovation takes place:* "The lessons themselves are fairly different in character. While some of them may reflect an achievement (e.g., score subjects in Swedish programmes), others may be an attempt at solving a problem (e.g., synoptic assessment in GNVQ); or while some are long-established features (e.g. the dual orientation of MBO courses), others are still innovative (e.g., the expansion and renovation of apprenticeships in Norway)".[8] These differing time frames certainly offer a significant lead for a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying innovations. At the same time, they raise the question of making innovation a subject of research, the meaning of which cannot be adequately apprehended on a spontaneous basis.

Conclusion: Symbolic violence, heuristic approach, appropriation by the actors?

It is clear that the assessment of the Intequal project gives the impression of an effort to be continued rather than satisfaction over work that has been completed. For the time being, questions of methods relating to the principles and forms of comparisons between country training systems are as important or more so relative to the observations that may be made about the "attractiveness of vocational education", the "inequality with general education" or the "parity of esteem" evoked in the objectives of the Leonardo programme. This might be perceived as a result of a willfully provocative statement of these objectives, intended to stimulate creativity, or as symbolic violence aimed at imposing a common European culture. In fact, only the way in which the overall evaluation of the Leonardo programme will be conducted will allow this question to be answered. In any case, the undeniable contribution of this programme is twofold:

• It allows training systems to be envisaged in their dynamic dimension, which earlier comparative studies tended to underestimate in their concern for defining structural features. This confirms the existence of a societal effect, which brings out the need to create a comprehensive approach to the different systems. For the moment, such an approach is limited to a small number of people. Is it possible to envision a Community approach to appropriation by the country actors?

• It brings out common questions amongst different countries whose inclusion within Community problematics, as defined in the framework of the Leonardo programme, is a result if not of outright manipulation then at least of considerable bending of the texts. Can we hope that future programmes will allow us to start out from preoccupations shared on the grassroots level?

Jean-Louis Kirsch (Céreq)
Sabine Manning (WIFO, Berlin) - Project coordinator

8. See note 6.

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Executive Publisher: Vincent Merle. Managing Editor: Michel Stoesz. Translator: Miriam Rosen
ISSN 1156 2366 **Dépôt légal 3e trimestre 1998**